

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Monumental Methodist Church

other names/site number Dinwiddie Street Methodist Church

VDHR File # 124-0034-0039

**2. Location**

street & number 450 Dinwiddie Street

not for publication

city or town Portsmouth

vicinity

state Virginia

code VA

county \_\_\_\_\_

code 740

Zip 23704

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_\_\_ locally. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

**U. S. Department of the Interior  
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**Monumental Methodist Church**  
**Portsmouth, VA**

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ \_X\_ private  
☐ \_\_\_ public-local  
☐ \_\_\_ public-State  
☐ \_\_\_ public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

\_X\_ building(s)  
 \_\_\_ district  
 \_\_\_ site  
 \_\_\_ structure  
 \_\_\_ object

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	1 buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	1 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**N/A**

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: \_Religion\_\_\_\_\_ Sub: \_\_Religious Facility\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

[illegible]

**7. Description****Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

☐ Late Victorian Gothic ☐  
☐  
☐

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation ☐ Coursed Granite Rubble and Brick with sand mortar ☐  
roof ☐ Slate ☐  
walls ☐ Brick and Stucco ☐  
☐  
other ☐  
☐

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

☐ Architecture \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Religion \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Social History \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** ☐ 1831-1857 \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ 1874-1876 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates** ☐ 1831-1833, 1864, 1874-1876, 1954 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder** ☐ Albert Lawrence West (1825-1892) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**
**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file** (NPS)

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** ☐ 0.618 acres \_\_\_\_\_

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing  
   1 \_18\_ \_383\_ 831.16    2 \_18\_ \_4077\_ 241.28  
   3 \_ \_ \_ \_                      4 \_ \_ \_ \_

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title: Stephanie A. T. Jacobs, Visual Resources Manager

Organization: Virginia Historical Society date 6/20/2003

street & number: 428 North Blvd P. O. Box 7311 telephone (804) 342-9693

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23221

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Trustees of Monumental Methodist Church

street & number 450 Dinwiddie Street telephone (757) 397-1297

city or town Portsmouth state VA zip code 23704

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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### 7. Summary Description:

Monumental Methodist Church is situated at the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen Streets in Old Towne Portsmouth. It is a contributing member of the Old Towne Portsmouth Historic district. The front façade of the five-bayed brick and stucco Victorian Gothic church is dominated by a one-hundred-and-eighty-six foot two part central tower. The gable roof of the sanctuary and the exterior of the tower are covered in slate, rectangular and hexagonal, respectively. The building was designed by Richmond architect Albert Lawrence West (1825-1892). It was built between 1874 and 1876 on the foundations of an earlier 1831 building that had burned in 1864. A brick, cinderblock, and concrete Sunday School building was added to the back of the sanctuary in 1954. Two doors in the choir that originally gave access to the area that contained the heating system were opened so that today two buildings connect. There are only two major changes on the interior. First, the organ was moved from the center balcony within the tower to the large gothic niche at the front of the church in 1898. A larger organ was added to the choir in 1913. Second, the wrought iron that surrounded the balconies that span three sides of the sanctuary were replaced with paneled wood in the early part of the twentieth century.

### Architectural Analysis

Monumental Methodist sits at the site of a previously existing church built between 1831 and 1833. The antebellum brick church burned in an unexplained fire in 1864. The foundations of the sanctuary, which date to 1831, consist of coursed granite rubble with handmade stretcher course brick above. All new brickwork added the exterior walls of the sanctuary at the time of construction in 1874 was added above the level of the water table. The stucco covering prevents us from knowing where the original brick ends and the newer brick begins. The front porch and tower foundations and choir niche foundations were added to the 1831 sanctuary foundations expanding the overall size of the structure.

The most prominent exterior feature is the two part central tower. The unusual spire is designed as an octagon projecting from a pyramid. The design is similar to the design shown in Plate 71 of Samuel Sloan's *City and Suburban Architecture*, 1859. The architectural pattern book *City and Suburban Architecture* published by Samuel Sloan of Philadelphia in 1859 can be linked with West from his one of his earliest major commissions Broad Street Methodist Church in Richmond (built 1859 demolished 1968). Designs that can be associated with this publication show up throughout West's career. In 1881, West designed another church similar to plate 71, the Church of the Holy Saviour

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in Montpelier, Va, now demolished. The lower section of the central tower is constructed of brick and stucco and includes the main entrance and central gothic stained glass window separated visually by horizontal elements. The brickwork at the main entrance shows a pointed arch with two elongated trifolts inset into the sides of the architrave. The central window consisting of two lancets and a roundel is surrounded by an architrave. The central façade is decorated with rows of decorative corbelling.

The sanctuary is eighty-four feet long and fifty-five feet wide with an interior balcony proceeding around three sides. The ceiling is covered with patterned tin separated by wooden ribs in the form of depressed arches that separate the interior into five bays. The ten lancet windows proceed floor to ceiling and paired along the north and south elevations. The windows were originally glazed with patterned white glass in the center and colored glass around the edges. In the early twentieth century four of the lower sections of the glazing were replaced with memorial windows. Two of these are done in the Tiffany style. There are also two narrower lancets positioned along the east facade on either side of the central tower. These windows provide light for the two curving stairways that give access to the balcony. The balcony is supported by ten triangular brackets along the north and south elevations. The brackets have a trifol design cut out from the center. The balcony railing was originally of wrought iron but was replaced with wood paneling in the early part of the twentieth century. The balcony is supported on east with four square wooden columns positioned at the front entrance to the sanctuary. The entrance way is separated into two parts with two sets of interior and one set of exterior doors. The pews are original to the 1874 building.

The church was originally lit with gas. The fixtures present today never used gas and were installed after the advent of electricity. New ducts for heating and air conditioning have also been installed below the lancet windows on the north and south elevations. The heating grates are built out from the walls below the windows on both sides.

The choir is the most altered area of the interior. The choir is dominated by a large gothic niche at the center. On either side of the niche are two smaller pointed arch doors. Albert West had designed a smaller gothic niche at the back of the church in the balcony under the steeple to house the organ. The light from the central window would have passed through the pipes of the organ into the sanctuary. But 1898, the organ was moved the balcony in front of the tower to the gothic niche at the front of the sanctuary. Pieces of the original organ remain the room below steeple suggesting that a new organ was acquired as all was it was not removed to the front of the church. A photograph taken of the interior of the church around 1900 shows the organ in the choir area. Also visible in the photo is an ornate paint

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and gilded placed on the back wall of the choir. A much larger organ was installed in 1913 and remains

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north and south elevations allows light from the central window in the tower to pass into the sanctuary. The door itself has been replaced but the position is the same.

At the same time Albert West was preparing the designs for Monumental Methodist Church he was also preparing designs for the alteration of his own parish church in Richmond, Centenary Methodist located at 411 East Grace Street.<sup>4</sup> West also designed Centenary with a gothic niche at the front and the organ in the balcony. The main difference between the two was the small doors were placed inside the niche instead of on either side as is seen at Monumental. In 1905 the congregation of Centenary decided to move their organ to the choir as well. But a much larger organ was chosen and a large triple gothic arch was added to the choir so it could accept the new organ. The new organ with triple arch dramatically altered the space within the interior of Centenary Methodist. The moved and subsequent enlargement of the choir was supervised by Albert West's son William Callis West. Albert West was known to design multiple building in the same style but even that has not saved his work from loss.

The brick and concrete Sunday School building was added between 1954 and 1955. The building completely surrounds the west elevation of sanctuary. The two pointed arch doors in the choir now lead directly into the Sunday School building. The building is designed with four hallways in a simple square with a small garden in the center. The Sunday School building does not contribute to the significance of the site.



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## **8. Statement of Significance**

Monumental Methodist Church is the current home of the oldest continuously meeting Methodist congregation in the South. The congregation acquired its present site, at the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen streets, in 1831. The church leaders after the move decided to give their prior home, a sprawling wooden structure on Glasgow Street, into the care of the African-American portion of the congregation. The Glasgow Street Church functioned almost as a mission parish having the support of the white congregants at the Dinwiddie Street Church. The chapel on Glasgow Street burned in 1856. The African-American congregation built a new church the next year at 637 North Street known as Emanuel A M. E. Church. The antebellum brick church at Dinwiddie and Queen Streets was destroyed by fire in 1864. The present Victorian Gothic building, built between 1874 and 1876, was designed by Albert Lawrence West (1825-1892), an architect from Richmond well-known for his church designs. Monumental Methodist Church is the best-preserved example of West's post-civil ecclesiastical work in Virginia. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A as having contributed to broad patterns of history in the South and under Criterion C as having high artistic values and being an outstanding example of its type.

## **Historical Background**

The Virginia Methodist Society was founded November 14, 1772. The first chapel in Portsmouth was built in 1775 and located on the corner of Effingham and South Streets. It is to this small chapel, where Robert Williams and Francis Asbury preached, that Monumental traces its history. In 1792 the congregation purchased a lot on the south side of Glasgow Street. The congregation constructed a wooden structure on the site. They also used the land surrounding the church as a cemetery. Twenty-one people are known to have been buried at the Glasgow street site, many of whom are founding members of the congregation.<sup>1</sup> The congregation acquired the present site on the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen Streets in 1831 and new church, known as Dinwiddie Street Methodist Church, was completed by 1833. The old church on Glasgow Street was turned over to the African American members of the congregation after the move.

The 1830's and 1840's was a difficult time in the Methodist church with the issue of slavery coming to the forefront. The Church had traditionally taken an anti-slavery stance from its beginnings forbidding ministers and office holders within the Conference from owning slaves and requiring all members to teach African Americans to read and write so that they could study the Bible. The culture of slavery was difficult to escape several Southern States made it illegal to free slaves. Many

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members were slave-holding Southerners. Many Northerners within the church became strong abolitionists. The tensions became so great that in 1844 the Annual Methodist Conference decided to split the Church into two halves North and South foreshadowing what would happen to the entire country sixteen years later.

Members of what became the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were portrayed after 1844 as evil slave holders. Historical research frequently demonstrates that such sweeping generalizations about any large group of people are simply untrue. Monumental's Trustee records show that throughout the first half of the nineteenth century they continuously licensed African-American preachers to go out and minister to the community.<sup>3</sup> The white congregation at the Dinwiddie Street Methodist Church treated the African American congregation at Glasgow Street almost as a mission parish assisting them financially and with anything they could not do on their own because of the laws of the State of Virginia. One of Monumental's most able members, George Bain, became the first minister of the Glasgow Street Church and stayed with the congregation for twenty years. In 1843 the year before the schism, the congregation at Glasgow Street became a stationed Methodist church, an accepted member parish of the Virginia Conference

The chapel on Glasgow Street burned in 1856 in a suspicious fire. The African-American congregation built a new church the next year at 637 North Street known as Emanuel A. M. E. Church. Much of the funding for the new structure on North Street came from Dinwiddie Street Methodist Church along with contributions from several other churches in Portsmouth. The 1831 church on the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen Streets itself burned in 1864. The congregation constructed a small wooden chapel at back of the lot and worshipped there until the current building was completed in 1876. The name was changed to Monumental Methodist Church at dedication as the new church was constructed as a memorial for the Rev. Robert Williams, a pioneer of Methodism in the South.

The Victorian Gothic building, which currently stands at the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen Streets, was designed by Richmond architect Albert Lawrence West (1825-1892). The treasurer of the board of trustees, John Luke Porter, who is best known for designing the CSS Virginia, kept meticulous records of construction which survive. The church cost \$31, 000 to build according to Porter's records. Although West designed the building he did not supervise construction like he did with many of his commissions. Nowhere in the records does it state that a contractor was paid to oversee construction. From the building's similarities to other West commissions and the one perspective drawing that exists as part of a flyer for the dedication it is obvious that the congregation did not deviate much from West's design.

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West was a prolific architect contributing substantially to the body of architecture in Virginia in the second half of the nineteenth century. He became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1890, the first native Virginian to be so honored. West designed more than two dozen churches during his career, half for Methodist congregations. Nearly all have been demolished or heavily altered as in the cases of the Church of our Holy Saviour and Centenary Methodist Church. Monumental Methodist Church has survived relatively intact allowing historians to better understand the career of one of Virginia's most important nineteenth century architects.

**Notes**

1. The trustees records in 1927 reported the names of 21 people who had been buried at the Glasgow Street site and whose headstones had been moved to Cedar Grove Cemetery in Portsmouth and to the church site on Dinwiddie Street. Minutes of the Trustees of Monumental Methodist Church, May 16, 1927.
2. William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 229-275.
3. Naomi Mitchell, "A Monument in Church History," Unpublished Research Paper, Hampton University, 1998
4. See Virginia Department of Historic Resources Archives File, 127-321

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**Bibliography**

Jacobe, Stephanie A. T. "Albert Lawrence West (1825-1892) From Master Builders to Architectural Professionals two hundred and fifty years of architecture in Virginia." Master of Arts thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2001.

Mapp, Alf J. and Ramona H. Mapp. "Portsmouth: A Pictorial History." Norfolk, Va: The Donning Company, 1989.

Minutes of the Trustees of Monumental Methodist Church

Monroe, Dorothy Fleet. "History of Monumental Methodist Church 1772-1966." n. p.:Monumental Methodist Church, 1966

Sweet, William Warren. *Methodism in American History*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources Archives Files, 124-34 and 127-321

Windley, Margaret. *The History of Monumental Methodist Church*. Unpublished Manuscript, n. d.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property contains all land described by tax map #12 parcel #93 in the City of Portsmouth Tax Assessor's office.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property contains all land purchased by the Trustees of Monumental Methodist Church in 1831 at the corner of Dinwiddie and Queen Streets in Portsmouth and intended as the site of their new church.

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Note: The following information is common all photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: Monumental Methodist Church

LOCATION: City of Portsmouth, Virginia

NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Stephanie A. T. Jacobe

LOCATION OF NEGATIVES: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

View of the Dinwiddie Street façade looking northwest

Photo 1 of 10 Negative #20637

Date: June 14, 2003

View of the east façade looking west

Photo 2 of 10 Negative #20637

Date: June 14, 2003

View of the sidewalk along the south façade of the church with entrance to Sunday School building

Photo 3 of 10 Negative #20639

Date: April 13, 2003

View of looking east showing church and Sunday school building

Photo 4 of 10 Negative #20697

Date: June 14, 2003

View showing the sidewalk along the north façade with entrance to the Sunday School building

Photo 5 of 10 Negative #20639

Date: April 13, 2003

View of sanctuary showing pews

Photo 6 of 10 Negative #20640

Date: June 14, 2003

View of the entrance way with doors and stairways to balconies

Photo 7 of 10 Negative #20641

Date: April 13, 2003

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View showing east side of sanctuary  
Photo 8 of 10 Negative #20641  
Date April 13, 2003

View of the southwest side of the sanctuary  
Photo 9 of 10 Negative#20641  
Date April 13, 2003

View of the south east side of the sanctuary  
Photo 10 of 10 Negative#20641  
Date April 13, 2003

**Supplementary Photos**

View of the Dinwiddie Street façade showing details in brickwork  
Photo 1 of 7 Negative #20638  
Date March 2, 2003

Detail view of Steeple  
Photo 2 of 7 Negative #20639  
Date: April 13, 2003

Detail view showing two part front façade of tower  
Photo 3 of 7 Negative#20637  
Date: June 14, 2003

Detail of elongated trefoils above main entrance front façade  
Photo 4 of 7 Negative #20637  
Date: June 14, 2003

Detail showing ends of depressed arches along ceiling of sanctuary  
Photo 5 of 7 Negative #20640  
Date: June 14, 2003

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Detail showing gothic niche  
Photo 6 of 7 Negative #20640  
Date: June 14, 2003

View of sanctuary  
Photo 7 of 7 Negative # 20641  
Date: April 13, 2003